

Grandchildren Living With Grandparents

Written by Joy Venhorst
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Many child welfare agencies are adapting services to better serve kin caregivers involved with the child welfare system. Research has suggested that relatives are more likely to receive such services as financial assistance, food stamps, or Medicaid for the child when they are involved with child welfare. However, the majority of grandchildren are being cared for by grandparents privately, without involvement of the child welfare system. Thus these families may need to seek the support of other agencies.

Finally, some local school systems offer services to help grandparents. These findings provide insights on three important aspects of service delivery that may be useful to shaping future programs and services to grandparent caregivers.

- **Targeting:** Grandparent caregivers need specific services. They struggle from a lack of income. Grandparents may have assets from years of working, but may now be retired and on a fixed income. Grandparent caregivers may receive a child-only grant, but their assets may limit their own eligibility for welfare. Welfare agencies may want to reconsider asset restrictions for applicants who are older relative caregivers. Significant proportions of grandparents also need food and housing assistance, as well as respite care and mental health services to assist those with poor mental health or high levels of aggravation. Many children in their care need assistance dealing with health, behavioral, and educational problems.

- **Outreach:** Grandparents are often not aware of the services available to them. Only 29 percent of children in grandparent care live in families receiving a child-only or foster care payment for their care. Previous research suggests that many grandparents feel there is a stigma associated with accepting services/aid and therefore avoid involvement with public agencies. Agencies might consider ways to extend information to this population as well as service delivery approaches that reduce the stigma associated with public assistance.

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- **Access:** Many grandparents have limited access to services. They are older and often have health problems, making traveling to agencies difficult. Moreover, having less formal education may limit their knowledge of available services. Agencies might consider strategies for reaching grandparent caregivers who are limited in their mobility or unable to find available resources. In addition, some grandparent caregivers have reported that they applied for assistance and were denied benefits. Studies have found that eligibility workers may not be aware of the services that grandparent care families can receive.

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